Incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems in Right to Education:
A Study of The Tea Tribes of Dooars, (Mal Subdivision), Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

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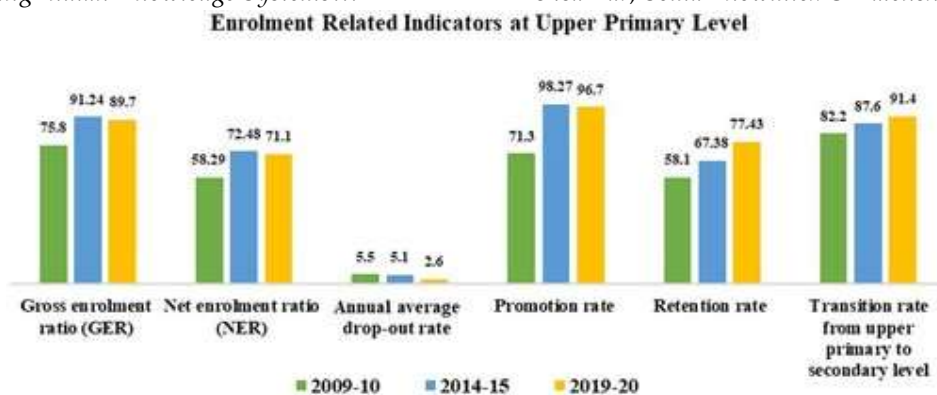
Abstract
The Right to Education (RTE) Act, enacted in India in 2009, signifies a major advancement in guaranteeing free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14. This article analyzes the execution of the RTE Act in the tea garden regions of the Dooars, concentrating on the Tea Tribes, who encounter many socio-economic difficulties. These issues include elevated poverty levels, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural obstacles that impede access to effective education. The research emphasizes the educational condition of the Tea Tribes, the influence of the RTE Act on their educational access, and the contribution of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in promoting a more inclusive and culturally relevant educational framework. This study conducts a thorough analysis of current literature to investigate the socio-economic realities of these communities and assess the efficacy of the RTE Act's provisions in this setting. The study underscores the need of incorporating ancient knowledge systems into contemporary education to reconcile formal schooling with the cultural realities of underprivileged populations. The results indicate that while the RTE Act has the capacity to enhance educational access, considerable hurdles persist regarding infrastructure, teacher training, and societal obstacles. The research suggests that using Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) may enhance an inclusive, comprehensive, and contextually relevant educational framework that serves the Tea Tribes of the Dooars and other underprivileged populations across India.

Keywords: Right to Education, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Indian Knowledge Systems, inadequate infrastructure

1. **Introduction:**

Children aged 6 to 14 are guaranteed free and compulsory education by the historic Right to Education (RTE) Act, which was enacted in India in 2009. A vital step toward attaining universal education and advancing educational equality for people from all socioeconomic backgrounds is this Act. Children from underprivileged areas may now obtain an education free from prejudice according to the RTE Act, which stipulates that every kid has the right to a high-quality education in a school that satisfies certain infrastructural and instructional criteria. Additionally, it highlights the significance of inclusive education, which guarantees that every kid, regardless of background, caste, or religion, has an equal chance to study and develop.

Enrolment Related Indicators at Upper Primary Level

Figure 1:

Right to education in India after decade

Since education is essential for ending poverty cycles and fostering social mobility, the significance of the RTE Act extends beyond its legislative framework to include its wider implications for socioeconomic development. RTE's implementation has been difficult despite its revolutionary potential, especially in rural, isolated, and tribal regions where there is still a lack of infrastructure, resources, and knowledge of the Act's provisions.

1.1. The Tea Tribes of Dooars: An Overview:

The colonial tea business gave rise to a distinctive cultural and socioeconomic population known as the Tea Tribes of Dooars, who live in West Bengal in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas. The British introduced these tribes to the Dooars in the 19th century to work on tea plantations. They came from a variety of ethnic origins, including Adivasis from areas like Jharkhand, Odisha, and Assam. By fusing aspects of their indigenous past with the effects of their labor-intensive environment, these communities have gradually created their own unique cultural identity.

The Tea Tribes' educational standing is still a major worry. Due to socioeconomic constraints, poor literacy rates, and a lack of knowledge of the Right to Education Act, children of tea garden workers sometimes have restricted access to high-quality education despite their rich cultural heritage. High rates of poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and the isolation of many tea plantations are some of the issues these communities confront, making it difficult for kids to attend formal schools. Furthermore, mainstream education often ignores the language, traditions, and traditional methods of instruction that are common in these communities, creating a gap between what is taught in classrooms and the cultural reality of the pupils.

A more inclusive and culturally appropriate educational system may be developed by taking into account the unique educational requirements of the Tea Tribes and appreciating the benefits of integrating Indian Knowledge Systems. In addition to enhancing these communities' general educational growth, this would protect and promote their rich cultural legacy and get the next generation ready for a more sustainable and integrated future.

2. Literature Review:

Bal (2005) carried out a PhD dissertation on disputes and their settlements in West Bengal's Terai, Dooars, and Darjeeling tea estates. With an emphasis on the root causes of disputes in these locations, the research brought attention to the socioeconomic difficulties encountered by tea garden laborers. The study demonstrated how problems including subpar working conditions, low pay, and insufficient social benefits led to conflicts between employees and management. Bal also covered a variety of conflict resolution techniques, such as government involvement and negotiations, stressing the need of comprehending the cultural and economic background in order to successfully settle these disagreements. The research advanced knowledge of the dynamics of labor in plantation regions, especially as it relates to the Dooars' tea gardens.

Bhattacharya and Khan examined the value of eco-cultural knowledge among Indian tribal people for the development of an Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and its applicability to the advancement of a green economy. Their research focused on how to incorporate the diverse indigenous knowledge systems of different tribal communities—which are closely linked to environmental stewardship and sustainable practices—into the broader framework of IKS. They maintained that the traditional ecological practices of tribal people, such organic farming, biodiversity preservation, and resource conservation, might greatly aid in the development of a green economy. Given the current environmental issues, this research emphasized the need of integrating eco-cultural knowledge into education and policy-making.

Biesta (2009) evaluated the current status of education critically, paying particular attention to the effects of standardized testing and assessment. In his paper "Good education in an age of measurement," Biesta made the case that modern educational institutions have deviated from addressing the core goal of education, which is the holistic development of persons, due to their heavy reliance on quantitative measurements and performance indicators. In addition to emphasizing that educational methods should concentrate on promoting critical thinking, moral development, and personal growth, he urged for a reconnection with the larger problems of education's purpose. Biesta's writings have had a significant impact on educational philosophy, pushing teachers to adopt a more holistic approach to education that takes ethics, values, and personal growth into account rather of concentrating just on standardized tests.

Kadaba, Aithal, and KRS (2023) reviewed the literature on how ancient Indian universities influenced the creation of the diverse and comprehensive Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Their research looked at the background of old Indian institutions like Takshashila and Nalanda, which were renowned for combining several fields including philosophy, science, medicine, and the arts. According to the writers, a holistic approach to education that fosters both intellectual and spiritual development has long been valued in Indian educational traditions. They proposed that the inclusive and transdisciplinary tenets of ancient Indian institutions may be advantageously incorporated into contemporary educational systems. Kadaba et al. suggested that IKS may be revived to solve current educational and social issues by referencing old knowledge systems. The need of reviving India's traditional teaching methods, which emphasize integrated learning and students' holistic development, was brought to light by this review.

3. The Right to Education Act in India:

3.1. Historical Context and Evolution of RTE

An important turning point in India's pursuit of universal education was the passage of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. Disparities have always existed in Indian education, especially across socioeconomic levels, castes, and geographical areas. Although the affluent had easy access to education, many others, notably women, Dalits, and tribal people, encountered obstacles in their pursuit of an education. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution, which promoted free and compulsory education for all children till the age of 14, was the first document to acknowledge the necessity for universal education. But for decades, the actual fulfillment of this constitutional promise remained a far-off dream.

When the government started the process of declaring education a basic right in the early 2000s after realizing the sluggish progress made toward educational parity, it marked a turning point. The 86th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 2002, making education a basic right under Article 21-A. This means that all children between the ages of 6 and 14 must receive free and compulsory education from the state. The final passage of the Right to Education Act in 2009 was made possible by this modification.

An important milestone for India was reached on August 4, 2009, when the RTE Act was approved by Parliament. It sought to fulfil the constitutional guarantee that all children aged 6 to 14 would receive free and compulsory education. This law addressed educational disparities nationwide by signaling a change in perspective from seeing education as a luxury to acknowledging it as a basic right of all children.
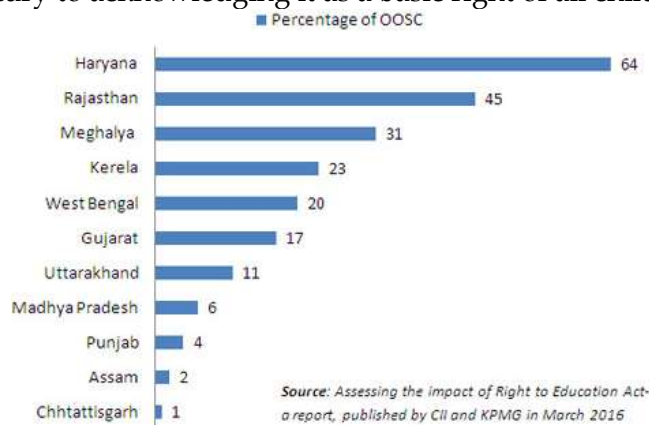

Figure 2:

Percentage of Out of school children

3.2. Key Provisions and Objectives of the RTE Act

The goal of the Right to Education Act of 2009 is to provide all children between the ages of 6 and 14 a thorough and inclusive education. The following are some of the main goals and clauses of the RTE Act:

1. **Free and Compulsory Education:** Under the Act, children aged 6 to 14 must receive free and compulsory education in a local school. This implies that the government is in charge of making sure that no kid is excluded from receiving an education because of their inability to pay.

2. **Quality criteria for Schools:** The Act establishes a number of guidelines and criteria for educational institutions, such as student-teacher ratios,

infrastructure specifications, and other amenities required to provide a positive learning environment. In order to provide high-quality education, it also requires the hiring of qualified instructors.

3. **Non-Discriminatory Admission:** According to the Act, no kid may be the target of discrimination on the basis of their social or financial standing. It forbids the use of physical punishment and the expulsion of minors. All students, especially those from underrepresented groups, must be admitted to schools without the use of entry examinations or prejudice.

4. **Curriculum and Teaching Methods:** The Act places a strong emphasis on a curriculum that fosters children's whole development, emphasizing not just academics but also their mental, emotional, and physical health. It promotes inclusive, student-centered teaching strategies that take into account their varied origins.

5. **School Management Committees (SMCs):** To guarantee community involvement in school governance, the Act presents the idea of SMCs. SMCs, which are made up of parents, educators, and local government representatives, are crucial in observing and enhancing the standard of instruction in schools.

6. **Special Provisions for Children with Disabilities:** Under the Act, schools are required to provide special education for children with disabilities, which includes making sure they have access to education through suitable channels and setting up the support networks they need to be included in mainstream classrooms.

7. **Right to Admission in Age-Appropriate classrooms:** Any child who has missed school has the right to be admitted to age-appropriate classrooms without facing any prejudice, guaranteeing that they may continue their education.

3.3. Implementation Challenges and Opportunities

Although the RTE Act offers a strong foundation for enhancing India's educational system, there have been a number of difficulties in putting it into practice, and there are still possibilities as well as hurdles.

- **Infrastructure and Resources:** Many schools, especially those in rural and isolated locations, lack proper infrastructure, which is one of the main obstacles to implementing the RTE Act. Basic infrastructure including enough classrooms, potable water, sanitary facilities, and enough instructional materials are lacking in many schools. Meeting the required infrastructural requirements for all schools is a difficulty, particularly in underprivileged areas.

- **Teacher Shortages and Quality:** India continues to have a severe teacher shortage, especially in rural and tribal regions, despite laws mandating the hiring of skilled educators. Since many instructors lack the knowledge required to apply child-centered pedagogical techniques successfully, the quality of instruction is still an issue. Although the Act mandates teacher training programs, filling up these gaps is a never-ending task.

- **Social and Cultural impediments:** Children from underprivileged populations, including Dalits, tribals, and girls, are unable to attend school in many areas due to social and cultural impediments. Traditional gender norms, poverty, and early

marriage sometimes serve as barriers to education. Legal provisions alone won't be enough to overcome these obstacles; targeted initiatives, community awareness, and cultural change are also necessary.

- **Budgetary Restrictions:** Even though the RTE requires free education, there are still significant costs associated with putting the Act into practice, particularly when it comes to building infrastructure, hiring teachers, and raising standards of instruction. Although the Indian government has made progress in providing funds for education, more work is still required, especially in rural and tribal regions.

- **Accessibility and Awareness:** Many families are still not aware of the RTE Act's obligations, particularly those in rural and tribal communities. In order to guarantee their children's enrolment, parents could not comprehend the value of education or might not be able to successfully navigate the educational system. To raise awareness and provide greater access, programs that teach parents about their rights and the possibilities provided by the RTE Act are crucial.

3.4. Opportunities

- **Technology Integration:** With the development of technology, there is a chance to improve educational access, particularly in rural regions. The gaps in infrastructure and instructor availability may be filled via e-learning, virtual classrooms, and online learning materials.

- **Community and NGO Involvement:** NGOs, local communities, and civil society groups play a crucial part in promoting awareness, assisting with teacher preparation, and assisting in the removal of societal obstacles to education.

- **Policy changes and Investments:** The government's ongoing dedication to raising educational standards via financing, policy changes, and public-private partnerships may aid in resolving issues with quality and infrastructure. Another important possibility may be to implement more regional policies that address the unique requirements of rural and tribal populations.

4. Understanding Indian Knowledge Systems (Iks)

4.1. Definition and Scope of IKS

The enormous amount of information that has been created, passed down, and used in India over thousands of years is referred to as Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). Philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, art, literature, agriculture, and architecture are just a few of the disciplines that are covered by these knowledge systems. IKS is a varied collection of intellectual traditions and practices that have developed throughout time, encompassing the ancient, medieval, and contemporary eras. It is not a single, cohesive institution.

IKS encompasses both academic and practical knowledge and has a broad reach. Along with the works of great philosophers like Patanjali, Aryabhata, Charaka, and Sushruta, ancient Indian literature like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas provide profound insights on a variety of topics. IKS also incorporates indigenous traditions like yoga, Ayurveda, Vastu Shastra, and traditional arts and crafts, which represent the diverse and multifaceted way of seeing and engaging with the world.

IKS is distinguished by its all-encompassing methodology, which highlights the interdependence of the natural world, humanity, and the cosmos. Additionally, it

emphasizes the importance of experience learning, moral principles, and knowledge transmitted orally and via cultural customs.

4.2. Relevance of IKS in Contemporary Education

The integrative and inclusive character of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) makes them very relevant in today's classroom. IKS offers an option that is firmly anchored in India's sociocultural context in a world where globalized and Westernized paradigms are increasingly influencing education. For students from underprivileged or indigenous groups, this cultural relevance is particularly important because it helps them feel proud of their traditions and beliefs and links them to their background. For instance, incorporating local knowledge into the classroom may improve student learning and give it more significance in areas like the Dooars.

In addition, IKS advocates for a comprehensive approach to education that takes into account students' emotional, spiritual, and physical health in addition to their academic growth. In contrast to the disjointed models sometimes seen in traditional educational institutions, this offers a more thorough learning experience and is in line with the current emphasis on emotional intelligence and mental wellness. Furthermore, with its expertise in eco-friendly techniques, sustainable living, and resource management, IKS provides insightful information about sustainability. This information is essential for raising a generation that understands its ecological imprint and is prepared with conventional, sustainable answers in the face of environmental deterioration and climate change.

IKS places a strong focus on value-based education, which is another important feature. IKS places a strong emphasis on values that are essential to character development, such as humility, honesty, compassion, and respect. IKS offers a framework for teaching pupils these values in addition to their academic curriculum, which is in line with the increased emphasis on ethics and moral education in modern education. Lastly, IKS promotes interdisciplinary education, which helps to close the gaps between different fields such as philosophy, physics, art, and the social sciences. This method encourages critical thinking and creativity, two abilities that are becoming more and more important in contemporary educational systems that place a strong emphasis on creativity and problem-solving. All things considered, incorporating IKS into modern education provides a more comprehensive, culturally appropriate, and values-based method that meets the demands of today's students.

5. The Tea Tribes of Dooars Mal Subdivision: Socio-Cultural Context

5.1. History and Demographics of the Tea Tribes

The Dooars area of West Bengal, India, is home to the major sociocultural group known as the Tea Tribes of Dooars. This group was mostly created during the colonial era when British planters imported workers from various regions of India to work on tea plantations; its history is entwined with the expansion of the Indian tea business. Most of these workers were from the tribal regions of Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, and other nearby locations. These laborers and their descendants were eventually referred to as the "Tea Tribes." The Santhals, Oraons, and Mundas are just a few of the varied tribal groupings that make up the Tea Tribes' demographic makeup. After being uprooted from their ancestral lands, these people progressively developed a unique cultural identity that was influenced by their labor on the tea plantations as well as their indigenous ancestry. The Tea Tribes of Dooars still reside in close-knit villages today, and although some have ventured into

small-scale business, agriculture, and the service sector, many still rely on the tea industry for their living.

5.2. Cultural Practices and Indigenous Knowledge

The traditional customs and practices that the Tea Tribes carried from their home areas form the foundation of their unique cultural legacy. These groups have historically engaged in hunting, gathering, and agriculture. They also celebrate the connection between nature and people via a variety of animistic rites and beliefs. An integral element of the community's cultural identity, many of these customs are transmitted orally via songs, tales, dances, and festivals. The Tea Tribes' indigenous knowledge is often centered on useful aspects of everyday living, such as agricultural methods, herbal remedies, and environmental care in the area. For instance, generations have passed down traditional knowledge about agricultural cycles, weather patterns, and medicinal herbs. The community has been able to adjust to the difficulties of living on a plantation thanks to these traditional customs, and their relationship with nature continues to play a significant role in their way of life. The maintenance of these native customs has been greatly damaged by modernization and outside cultural influences, particularly from the tea business. Some traditional knowledge systems are gradually being lost as newer generations of the Tea Tribes get more educated and exposed to mainstream culture, which causes them to become more disconnected from their cultural legacy.

5.3. Educational Challenges Faced by the Tea Tribes

Numerous educational obstacles impede the overall growth of the Tea Tribes of Dooars. Poverty is among the most important issues. A large number of Tea Tribe households are impoverished, which limits their access to high-quality education. Due to financial limitations, children are compelled to work on tea farms or other family jobs from a young age, which limits their time and educational opportunities. Another significant issue in the Dooars area is access to education. The infrastructure in isolated plantation regions is still lacking, despite the Indian government's efforts to provide universal education under the Right to Education Act (RTE). Inadequate transportation, a dearth of nearby schools, and a lack of qualified educators who are aware of the unique requirements of the Tea Tribes are the region's defining characteristics. Furthermore, a lot of schools don't provide culturally appropriate instruction, which makes the Tea Tribes feel excluded from the educational process.

Another major factor restricting the Tea Tribes' access to schooling is language limitations. The educational curriculum is often taught in languages like Bengali or Hindi, which the Tea Tribes do not know well, and many of their children speak their native tongues. Children have extra challenges in comprehending their teachings and actively engaging in class as a result of this linguistic barrier. Some members of the Tea Tribes are unaware of the value of education, which is made worse by the historical marginalization of their group. Because many families place a higher priority on short-term financial survival than long-term educational objectives, this might result in a lack of parental support for education.

6. Conclusion

The Right to Education (RTE) Act's implementation has significantly advanced India's goal of universal access to education, especially for underserved groups like the Tea Tribes of Dooars. But obstacles including poor infrastructure, a lack of teachers, social and cultural impediments, and financial limitations still prevent it from being fully realized, especially in rural and tribal regions. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) may provide important insights into developing more culturally relevant and inclusive curriculum that appeal to a variety of cultures when included into the educational system. India may go closer to attaining real educational fairness and empowerment for all of its children by tackling these issues and taking use of possibilities like technological integration, community participation, and regulatory changes.

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